

CLAIMS

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method for a client to contact a counseling provider over a communications network comprising the steps 5 of:

a client logging in to a counseling service over a communications network;

presenting by the counseling service the client with a list of counselors and the times slots in which they are 10 available;

selecting a counselor from the list of counselors and time slots;

scheduling a time slot for a session with the counselor; and

15 establishing a communication connection between the client and the selected counselor at the scheduled time slot.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein the communications network is a computer network.

20 3. The method of claim 2, wherein the list of available counselors is presented to the client on a web site.

25 4. The method of claim 1, wherein the communications network is a telephone network.

30 5. The method of claim 4, wherein the list of available counselors is presented to the client over the telephone connection by either an interactive voice response system or a customer service representative.

6 The method of claim 1, wherein the session time slot can be scheduled in the future.

7. The method of claim 6, further comprising the step of the client rescheduling a session scheduled for a future time slot.

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8. The method of claim 1, wherein the session time slot can be scheduled immediately for the client.

9. The method of claim 1, wherein the communication connection established between the client and the selected counselor is over a computer network.

10 10. The method of claim 9, wherein the communication connection is selected from a group consisting of an Internet 15 chat room, a voice-over-Internet connection, and a video-over-Internet connection.

11. The method of claim 1, wherein the communication between the client and the selected counselor is established 20 over a telephone network.

12. The method of claim 1, further comprising the steps of:

25 presenting by the service the client with a list of payment options; and

the client selecting a payment option from the list of payment options.

13. The method of claim 12, wherein the payment options 30 comprise a pre-paid account and a pay-as-you-go account.

14. The method of claim 12, further comprising the step of, after the session, offering the client an opportunity to

buy more session time.

15. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step
of, after the counseling session, presenting the client with
5 one or more survey questions to answer.

16. A method for a counselor to contact a client over a
communications network comprising the steps of:

a counselor logging into a counseling service over a
10 communications network;

the counselor indicating availability for connection
to a client;

the counselor being contacted by the service to be
connected to a client; and

15 establishing a communication connection between the
counselor and the client.

17. The method of claim 16, further comprising the step
of the counselor providing the service with at least one
20 communication connection mode for connection to a client, and
a contact number for that communication connection mode.

18. The method of claim 17, wherein the counselor
provides, along with the at least one communication connection
25 mode, a schedule comprising one or more times slots of
availability for that communication connection mode.

19. The method of claim 18, wherein the counselor can
change the time of a time slot of availability for a
30 communication connection mode, for a time slot of availability
previously provided to the counseling service.

20 The method of claim 18, wherein the counselor

provides the schedule to the service over a telephone network.

21. The method of claim 18, wherein the schedule is
communicated to a client over a telephone connection by an
5 interactive voice response system operated by the service.

22. The method of claim 18, wherein the schedule is
communicated to a client over a telephone connection by a
customer service representative employed by the service.

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23. The method of claim 18, wherein the counselor
provides the schedule to the service over a computer network.

24. The method of claim 18, wherein the schedule is
15 posted on a web site operated by the service.

25. The method of claim 17, wherein the communication
connection mode is a telephone network, and the contact number
for that mode is a phone number.

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26. The method of claim 17, wherein the communication
connection mode is a computer network, and the contact number
for that mode is an address of a computer on that network.

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27. The method of claim 26, wherein the communication
connection mode is one of a chat room session, a voice-over-
Internet connection, or a video-over-Internet connection.

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28. The method of claim 17, wherein the communication
connection established between the counselor and the client is
one of the at least one communication connections modes
provided to the service by the counselor.

29. The method of claim 16, wherein the service contacts the counselor over a telephone network for connection to a client.

5 30. The method of claim 16, wherein the service contacts the counselor over a computer network for connection to a client.

10 31. The method of claim 16, wherein the communications network over which the counselor logged into the counseling service is a telephone network.

15 32. The method of claim 31, wherein the counselor indicates availability to an interactive voice response system operated by the service.

20 33. The method of claim 31, wherein the counselor indicates availability to a customer service representative employed by the service.

34. The method of claim 16, wherein the communications network over which the counselor logged into the counseling service is a computer network.

25 35. The method of claim 34, wherein the counselor indicates availability to a web site operated by the service.

30 36. The method of claim 16, further comprising the step of the counselor providing the service with at least one specialization category.

37. A method of connecting a client to a counselor over a communications network comprising the steps of:

a counselor logging into a counseling service over a first communications network;

the counselor indicating availability for connection to a client;

5 a client logging in to the counseling service over a second communications network;

presenting to the client a list of counselors and the times slots in which they are available;

10 selecting a counselor from the list of counselors and time slots;

scheduling a time slot for a session with the counselor;

the counselor being contacted by the service to be connected to the client; and

15 establishing a communication connection between the client and the selected counselor at the scheduled time slot.

38. The method of claim 37, wherein the first communications network is a computer network.

20 39. The method of claim 38, wherein the counselor indicates availability to a web site operated by the service.

40. The method of claim 37, wherein the second communications network is a computer network.

25 41. The method of claim 40, wherein the list of available counselors is presented to the client on a web site.

30 42. The method of claim 37, wherein the first communications network is a telephone network.

43. The method of claim 42, wherein the counselor

indicates availability to either an interactive voice response system operated by the service, or to a customer service representative employed by the service.

5 44. The method of claim 37, wherein the second communications network is a computer network.

10 45. The method of claim 44, wherein the list of available counselors is presented to the client over the telephone connection by either an interactive voice response system or a customer service representative.

15 46. The method of claim 37, further comprising the step of the counselor providing the service with at least one specialization category.

20 47. The method of claim 37, further comprising the steps of:

 presenting to the client a list of payment options;

25 and

 the client selecting a payment option from the list of payment options.

30 48. The method of claim 47, wherein the payment options comprise a pre-paid account and a pay-as-you-go account.

49. The method of claim 47, further comprising the step of, after the session, offering the client an opportunity to buy more session time.

50. The method of claim 37, further comprising the step of, after the counseling session, presenting the client with one or more survey questions to answer.

51. The method of claim 37, wherein the session time slot can be scheduled in the future.

5 52. The method of claim 51, further comprising the step of the client rescheduling a session scheduled for a future time slot.

10 53. The method of claim 37, wherein the session time slot can be scheduled immediately for the client.

15 54. The method of claim 37, further comprising the step of the counselor providing the service with at least one communication connection mode for connection to a client, and a contact number for that communication connection mode.

20 55. The method of claim 54, wherein the counselor provides, along with the at least one communication connection mode, a schedule comprising one or more times slots of availability for that communication connection mode.

25 56. The method of claim 55, wherein the counselor can change the time of a time slot of availability for a communication connection mode, for a time slot of availability previously provided to the counseling service.

57. The method of claim 55, wherein the counselor provides the schedule to the service over a telephone network.

30 58. The method of claim 55, wherein the counselor provides the schedule to the service over a computer network.

59. The method of claim 54, wherein the communication

connection mode is a telephone network, and the contact number for that mode is a phone number.

60. The method of claim 54, wherein the communication
5 connection mode is a computer network, and the contact number for that mode is an address of a computer on that network.

61. The method of claim 60, wherein the communication
connection mode is one of a chat room session, a voice-over-
10 Internet connection, or a video-over-Internet connection.

62. The method of claim 54, wherein the communication
connection established between the counselor and the client is
one of the at least one communication connections modes
15 provided to the service by the counselor.

63. The method of claim 37, wherein the service contacts
the counselor over a telephone network for connection to a
client.

20 64. The method of claim 37, wherein the service contacts
the counselor over a computer network for connection to a
client.

25 65. A system of connecting a client to a counselor over
a communications network, said system comprising:

means for a counselor to log into a counseling
service over a first communications network;

30 means for the counselor to indicate availability for
connection to a client;

means for a client to log into the counseling
service over a second communications network;

means for presenting to the client a list of

counselors and the times slots in which they are available;

means for the client to select a counselor from the list of counselors and time slots;

5 means for scheduling a time slot for a session with the counselor;

means for contacting the counselor for connection to the client; and

10 means for establishing a communication connection between the client and the selected counselor at the scheduled time slot.

66. The system of claim 65, wherein the first communications network is a computer network.

15 67. The system of claim 66, wherein the means for the counselor to indicate availability is a web site operated by the service.

20 68. The system of claim 65, wherein the second communications network is a computer network.

69. The system of claim 68, wherein the means for presenting to the client the list of available counselors is a web site.

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70. The system of claim 65, wherein the first communications network is a telephone network.

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71. The system of claim 70, wherein the means for the counselor to indicate availability is either an interactive voice response system operated by the service, or a customer service representative employed by the service.

72. The system of claim 65, wherein the second communications network is a computer network.

73. The system of claim 72, wherein the means for 5 presenting the list of available counselors over the telephone connection to the client is either an interactive voice response system or a customer service representative.

74. The system of claim 65, further comprising means for 10 the counselor to provide the service with at least one specialization category.

75. The system of claim 65, further comprising:
means for presenting to the client a list of payment 15 options; and
means for the client to selecte a payment option from the list of payment options.

76. The system of claim 75, wherein the payment options 20 comprise a pre-paid account and a pay-as-you-go account.

77. The system of claim 75, further comprising means for, after the session, offering the client the opportunity to buy more session time.

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78. The system of claim 65, further comprising means for, after the counseling session, presenting the client with one or more survey questions to answer.

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79. The system of claim 65, wherein the session time slot can be scheduled in the future.

80. The system of claim 79, further comprising means for

the client to reschedule a session scheduled for a future time slot.

81. The system of claim 65, wherein the session time
5 slot can be scheduled immediately for the client.

82. The system of claim 65, further comprising means for
the counselor to provide the service with at least one
communication connection mode for connection to a client, and
10 a contact number for that communication connection mode.

83. The system of claim 82, further comprising means for
the counselor to provide, along with the at least one
communication connection mode, a schedule comprising one or
15 more times slots of availability for that communication
connection mode.

84. The system of claim 83, further comprising means for
the counselor to change the time of a time slot of
20 availability for a communication connection mode, for a time
slot of availability previously provided to the counseling
service.

85. The system of claim 83, wherein the means for
25 providing the schedule to the service comprises a telephone
network.

86. The system of claim 83, wherein the means for
providing the schedule to the service comprises a computer
30 network.

87. The system of claim 82, wherein the communication
connection mode is a telephone network, and the contact number

for that mode is a phone number.

88. The system of claim 82, wherein the communication connection mode is a computer network, and the contact number for that mode is an address of a computer on that network.

89. The system of claim 88, wherein the communication connection mode is one of a chat room session, a voice-over-Internet connection, or a video-over-Internet connection.

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90. The system of claim 82, wherein the communication connection established between the counselor and the client is one of the at least one communication connections modes provided to the service by the counselor.

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91. The system of claim 65, wherein the means for the service to contact the counselor for connection to a client comprises a telephone network.

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92. The system of claim 65, wherein the means for the service to contact the counselor for connection to a client comprises a computer network.